



SMALL WARS

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Afghanistan 2014-2024: Advising for Sustainability

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President Obama's trip to Afghanistan to sign a long-term strategic partnership extending through the end of 2024 was a significant milestone for America's longest war. Given the current environment, troubling events and contested issues – Koran burnings, 'green-on-blue' attacks, a rogue soldier committing murder, night raids and detention facilities – this agreement is progress in strained relations and for a war-weary home front. Most important, this pact assuages Afghan fears of repeat abandonment and signals to the Taliban that their waiting game will continue should they not reconcile.

As 2014 marks the end of NATO's *combat* role in Afghanistan, internal political conflict will persist and test the strength of a fledgling state and security apparatus. President Obama confirmed that for at least another decade, the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) will need substantial security assistance, financial as well as advisors, trainers and advanced technical, logistical, maintenance and airlift support. Estimates range from \$4-8 billion annually. Accordingly, U.S. and NATO military forces, government civilians, and civilian contractors will still be needed in Afghanistan well into the foreseeable future.

Based on ongoing research on U.S. and NATO partnering efforts across the Afghan security sector, there are at least two U.S. defense policy challenges in the upcoming transition: (1) how to smartly program and administer available (if not decreasing) security assistance funds to continue developing an *Afghan-sustainable* security sector capable of preventing another Taliban resurgence or civil war; and (2) how to institutionalize in the Department of Defense (DoD) community and the broader coalition of ISAF nations, an *enduring* and *integrated* capability to deliver effective security assistance and security force assistance (SA/SFA) across a range of partnering environments from highly politicized foreign ministries, to training facilities and academies, to operations including civil policing and foreign internal defense.

As if these are not difficult enough challenges, multiple factors – international and domestic – weigh on the wisdom of subsidizing Afghan security into perpetuity: fiscal pressures demanding austerity; national and military fatigue with statebuilding; and the belief that the U.S. achieved its security objectives in Afghanistan by eliminating Osama bin Laden.

These factors also place pressure on military strategy and program priorities within the Pentagon and our Alliance partners. Like the American public, the military is signaling a shift away from counterinsurgency (COIN) and stability operations back to its comfort zone in planning and training for conventional wars. Undoubtedly, rebalancing the force and recalibrating our strategic posture is necessary given the complexity of the current security environment. Nevertheless, there are deep concerns among many that "COIN is dead" and that U.S. and NATO forces will soon discard the hard-won lessons of the last decade in favor of protecting budgets and institutional relevance.

Given this climate, how can the international community ensure future security assistance programming in Afghanistan is implemented wisely and properly institutionalize these efforts for the future? The following recommendations are based on ongoing research, which include several dozen in-depth conversations with a cross-section of senior U.S. military and civilian DoD officials, field- and company-grade officers, special operations forces, and civilian contractors that have served in an advisory capacity to the ANSF.

1. ***Re-prioritize Afghan Ministerial Development over Force Generation.***

The ANSF have demonstrated some gains in tactical effectiveness in recent months, but they have not yet fully developed broader organizational and institutional systems needed to sustain their forces from within. Lieutenant General William Caldwell, former NATO Training Mission - Afghanistan (NTM-A) commander, has noted that even the best trained and professional force will wither without the institutional systems to recruit, pay, supply and equip, train and employ, and sustain them. Until now, the priority has been to quickly 'train and equip' to generate and push Afghan forces into the lead as counterinsurgents.

Building ministerial capacity simply takes longer. By the end of 2014 NTM-A will evolve, though its mission will not likely change much as training and advising efforts across the Afghan security sector will be necessary for years to come. As this transition occurs, it is imperative to retain, if not grow, where appropriate, the number of advisors who can provide subject matter expertise and assistance in developing ministerial competencies to govern the security sector on such matters as budgeting, human resources, acquisitions and facilities.

Setting aside the larger challenge of growing the Afghan economy and right-sizing the overall force to an affordable size, the ANSF will never truly be sustainable until their ministries of defense and interior can perform these critical enterprise-level functions independently. But this does *not* mean we ought to continue pushing expensive and unsustainable systems that the ANSF will simply disregard once U.S. advisors leave or the slush fund dries up. It is paramount that we foster systems that are either emulated and adapted to local realities by Afghans themselves, or those that are Afghan-developed, realistic, and ultimately work with minimal foreign assistance.

1. ***Improve Systems that Get the Right People on the Team.***

Jim Collins's imperative from *Good to Great* aptly applies to security force assistance. There is a common misperception across the international donor community that any soldier, police officer, or other expert, can be an effective advisor with a certain level of cultural and language training. This is simply false. In fact, in many cases the *wrong* person for the job can do more harm than no person at all. Though no surprise to many who have been there, effective advising requires not only a mix of cultural training, education and life experience, but more importantly, interpersonal skills of patience and influencing through persuasion and interest-based negotiation over methods of coercion or using material incentives. Effective advising is as much, if not more, about personality, as it is about experience and training, thus leaving advisor selection a critical piece for SFA.

Still, even the most highly trained, culturally and emotionally intelligent advisor is of little use if they are assigned to a senior official without having relevant functional expertise that aligns with the needs of their counterpart. Though the Afghan ministries are dominated by current and former general officers, depending on the Afghan position (civilian administrator, military officer, or police), a military officer may not be the best choice as an advisor to an Afghan police commander, who, for instance, requires assistance on matters of civil policing, search and seizure, criminal procedure, and

investigations. Instead, this work is better suited for a law enforcement professional.

This challenge amounts to a supply and demand problem for a high-specialized, complex service, drawn from all of the participating ISAF nations. There is great demand for well-trained and experienced subject matter experts who also have the right skills and personality attributes to serve as advisors. Unfortunately, the supply of advisors is low, and to further complicate matters, it is scattered across key international contributors' military and civilian workforces as well as the private sector, making it a significant challenge to select, train and assign the best or most appropriate advisor for key advisory assignments.

NATO and the U.S. should strengthen and better integrate systems to select, train, and assign advisors to key billets across the uniformed services and civilian workforce. Additionally, they should strengthen their contract management capacity to work more closely with private contractors and build-in greater flexibility to rapidly adjust contract terms to meet the dynamic needs for training and advising foreign security forces. Reliance on the private sector to assume a larger role in training and mentoring will only increase as fiscal pressures mount in the coming years. Accordingly, a closer partnership with the private sector and a mutual commitment to increasing the overall quality and professionalism of the Afghan police, which has been seconded to a 'train and equip' approach until now, are also critical.

1. ***Institutionalize Security Assistance as a Tool of Smart Power and Conflict Prevention.***

The U.S. must better prepare for the present era in which security assistance – training, mentoring and professionalizing foreign militaries and police – will be central to our national security strategy. Treating our experiences in Afghanistan as if they will never be repeated again is foolhardy and belies the reality of today's complex security environment. Over the past decade we have developed pivotal capabilities for conflict and postconflict environments that are equally applicable to *conflict prevention*.

The new Ministry of Defense Advisors (MoDA) program and the Afghanistan-Pakistan (AFPAK) Hands program are two critical U.S. initiatives aimed at developing greater capacity for partnering within the civilian defense workforce and general purpose forces – though their focus has been primarily on Afghanistan. The Joint Center for International Security Force Assistance (JCISFA) and the U.S. Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute (PKSOI) are key resources for collecting lessons learned and conducting critical analysis our partnering efforts.

Given U.S. taxpayers' sunk investment in developing these capabilities, it would be a waste to let these programs die or wither on the vine, particularly when they hold the key to conserving resources if combined with conflict prevention. We must continue to support the MoDA and AFPAK Hands programs and our professional military education centers of excellence. But we must also go a step further to better integrate and globalize these efforts under a broader and united effort, similar to NATO's 'Partnership for Peace' program. Embracing and institutionalizing security assistance as a critical national security goal and a foreign policy tool in which the military plays a vital role will enhance our collective ability to persuade, attract and shape our future in a multi-polar world at a time when the options for using coercive powers are increasingly limited.

About the Author



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